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THESIS

THE THWARTED POE

by

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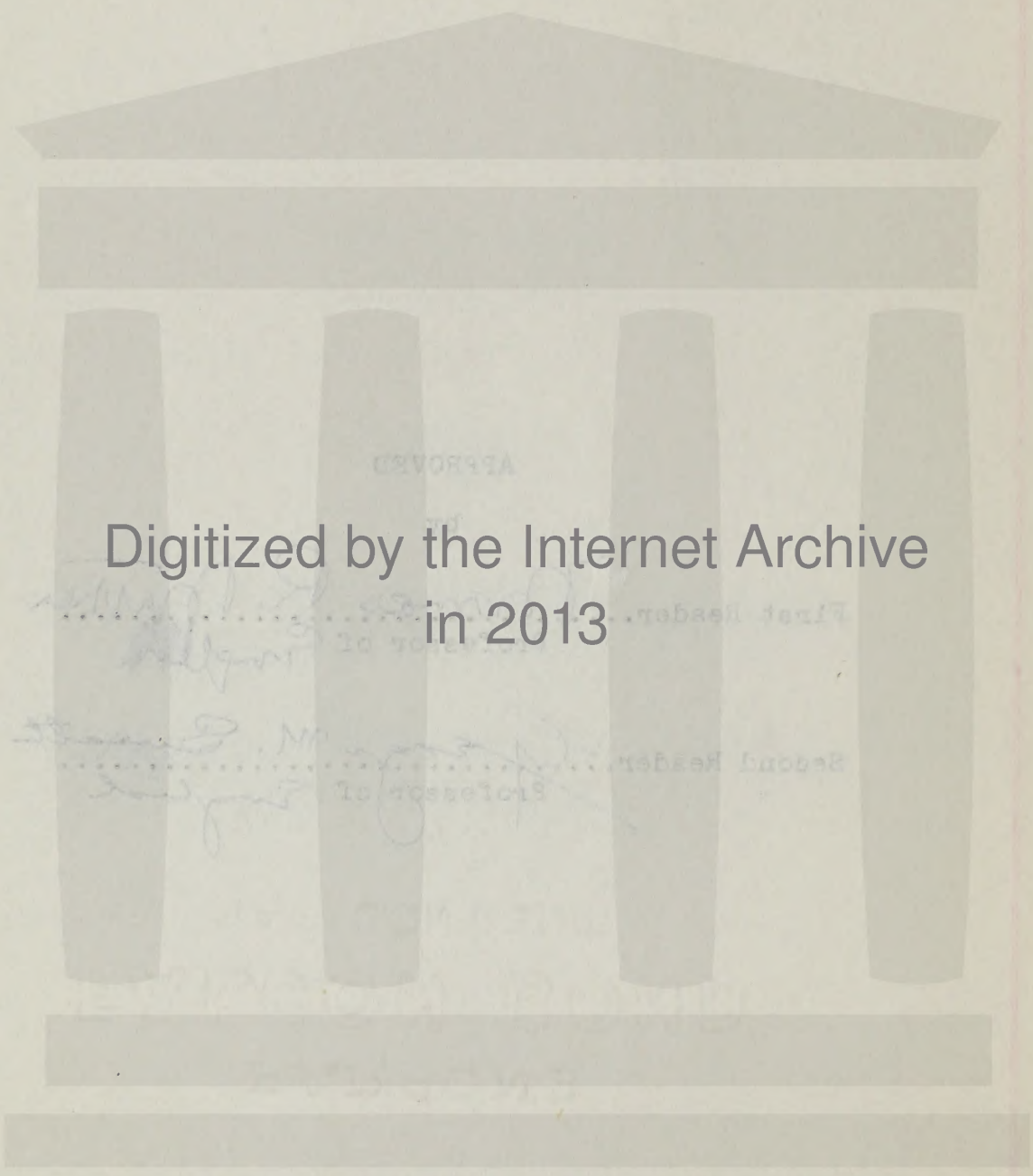

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THE THWARTED POE

I. Introduction

A. Purpose

The author has endeavored to show how the heredity and personal disappointments in the life of Edgar Allan Poe influenced his literary works.

B. Method of Research

The choice of this subject was made by the writer because of a keen interest in the life and works of Poe. Biographies, medical discussions, psychological reports, letters, and criticisms were studied, the findings of this research were correlated with events in his life and his writings, and, as a result of this study, a chain of disappointments was constructed to show their influence on his literary work.

Edgar Allan Poe was destined by his heredity, birth, life itself and a sustained "shadow of death" to become thwarted in every respect. From the day of his birth to the day of his death, it was he

"Whom unmerciful disaster
Followed fast and followed faster."[1]

[1]"The Raven"

THE THWARTED POE

PART I

The opinions of his friends, eminent physicians, and his mother-in-law concerning Poe's hereditary disease of mind and body (dipsomania).

These statements tend to prove that his morbid heredity, more than his environment, was responsible for his cleverness and talent, his success and failure, as well as his nervous ineptitude and his lapses.

THE TORMENTED POE

PART I

THE THWARTED POE

Purpose: to show how his heredity affected his writings.

"The struggles, the disillusions, and the enmities of life are a part of daily experience. Either death should bring compensating oblivion, or it should throw the mantle of charity over our frailties.

"Bitterly as Poe suffered while he lived, and disastrous as was the fate that overwhelmed him, it was his ill fortune to be even more harshly judged in death than while he lived and fought. Alive, he was feared; dead a dastardly advantage was taken and his works were sent forth containing a memoir that has been well called an 'immortal infamy.'

"While the reputation of no other American writer stands so preeminent as does that of Poe, yet there is, mingled with admiration, mistrust of the man: a belief that much of the weirdness and vividness of his stories and poems was the result of an abnormal mentality, which, of necessity, were the emanations of a brain diseased or drugged.

"Heredity which, more than environment, dominates every human being, was responsible both for Poe's brilliant endowments, and for the one evil which was so woven into the web of his life that a mere statement of the evidence, without fully weighing it, might seem to justify the strictness of certain of his contemporaries, but which in no way justify the vicious assault upon Poe's memory made by his first editor.

"Poe inherited a nervous temperament that was pregnant with good as well as evil. This psychoneurotic

heredity may manifest itself in many ways.

"In the particular case of Poe, and because alcohol was his usual refuge, the term 'dipsomania' can be properly used. Dipsomania necessarily has an alcoholic inheritance. During the attack there is usually loss of self-control and an abnormal ideation.

"A study of Poe's heredity and life work makes it plain that many of Griswold's allegations, even when true, cannot justly be charged against Poe, but rather against his morbid heredity. If this seems too fine a distinction, at least we must recognize the fact that, by reason of this heredity, Poe was not always to be held responsible either for his words or his acts, for his great accomplishments or his lapses.

"I am certain that the pictures painted have not truly represented the real man; ...."[1]

".... we must be impressed that both environmental circumstances and natural inheritance seem to conspire to cast the young poet in a role that is both sombre and wild, with a beauty that chills even more than it saddens.

"His 'will to power' would brook no superior nor even equal, in either physical or mental pursuits, and it was this intolerance of the claims of mediocrity which brought upon him in later life the enemity of much of the literary world.

[1]Edgar Allan Poe, A Study, John W. Robertson, M.D.

"His insistence, as a critic, that beauty is the sole motive of poetry, may be regarded as an attempt to place the stamp of critical approval on that which he himself did best. He had the characteristic over-valuation of the opposite sex (female poets and writers) which according to Adler, is invariably connected with the neurotic constitution."[1]

In a study of only and favorite children, Brill made many claims, two of which may be applicable to Poe: namely, one, a very poor competitor in the struggle for existence; two, a shirker in facing the hard facts of everyday life--the artistic world was a greater gratification for his egotistic impulses.

The neurotic, according to Pruette, begins life anew with each new friend and with each change of circumstance. This fact was certainly evident in the life of Poe as he dropped one friend, after each spasm of illness, and adopted another to take his place until temper, change of fortune, or unwillingness to render personal and financial aid on the friend's part caused a breach in the amity. As Sherwin Cody stated in his book, Poe--Man, Poet, and Creative Thinker: "....that peculiar element in Poe's character which made long-continued relations with other people almost impossible.

"There is but one conclusion to draw, and that is that in his character there was an element of perversity,

[1] A Psycho-Analytical Study of Edgar Allan Poe, Lorine Pruette

which the author of The Imp of the Perverse must have understood very well."

Graham, the editor, asserted: "It is true, that later in life Poe had much of those morbid feelings which a life of poverty and disappointment is so apt to engender in the heart of man--the sense of having been ill-used, misunderstood, and put aside by men of far less ability, and of none...."

"....he could not repeat a success. His genius roused jealousies, and he lacked the tact to allay those jealousies, rather he was irritable, impatient, and caustic, and, ... flew at those he disliked or disapproved, with a glittering fury that fixed all eyes upon him and made lifelong enemies of those he attacked."

And, again, in New Glimpses of Poe, by James A. Harrison: "The Hamlet nature of the man, with its unsteady purpose, its wonderfully poetic flickerings, its strange logic, and its boundless inconsequence, makes him a unique psychological study...."

In 1848, Lowell in his Fable for Critics stated: "But somehow the heart seems squeezed out by the mind."

Mrs. Whitman, in her introductory letter to Didier's Life of Poe, expressed her opinion of the writer thus: "....his proud reserve, his profound melancholy, his unworldiness of nature made his character one very difficult of comprehension to the casual observer."

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"His analytic mind," again says Pruette, "showed a peculiar fascination for the secrets of the tomb, a desire to probe into the last hidden process of life's disintegration .... one example of the idea by which he was haunted through life: that the dead are not wholly dead to consciousness."

Ingram quoted the following statement by Poe himself in a letter dated January 4, 1848 (to an "esteemed correspondent"):

"But I am constitutionally sensitive--nervous in a very unusual degree. I became insane, with long intervals of horrible insanity. (He refers here to that period of his life in which his young wife repeatedly broke a blood vessel at which times--and there were many--her life was despaired of.) During these fits of absolute unconsciousness, I drank--God only knows how often or how much. As a matter of course, my enemies referred the insanity to the drink, rather than the drink to the insanity. I had, indeed, nearly abandoned all hope of a permanent cure, when I found one in the death of my wife. This I can and do endure as becomes a man. It was the horrible never-ending oscillation between hope and despair which I could <u>not</u> longer have endured, without total loss of reason. In the death of what was my life, then I receive a new, but--Oh God! --how melancholy an existence."

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William Poe wrote to his cousin Edgar: "There is one thing I am anxious to question you against, and which has

been a great enemy in our family,--I hope, however, in your case, it may prove unnecessary,--'a too free use of the bottle'."

Mrs. M. L. Shew, one of Poe's friends, who had been educated as a physician and cared for him during his attack of brain fever after the death of his wife, says, "I made my diagnosis, and went to the great Dr. Mott with it;--I decided that in his best health he had a lesion of one side of the brain, and as he could not bear stimulants or tonics, without producing insanity, I did not feel much hope that he could be raised up from brain fever brought on by extreme suffering of mind and body--actual want, and hunger, and cold having been borne by this heroic husband in order to supply food, medicine, and comforts to his dying wife--until exhaustion and lifelessness were so near at every reaction of the fever, that even sedatives had to be administered with extreme caution."

The subsequent studies of Poe's physical make-up were brought forward by Dr. Robertson and Mr. J. A. Harrison to disprove the allegations that he was a drug addict and an habitual drunkard: "That he was not a subject of delirium tremens, as had been asserted, is attested by his singularly clear and regular handwriting, which we have in abundance at all periods of his career."[1]

[1]Edgar Allan Poe, A Study, J. W. Robertson

[1] Edgar Allan Poe, A Study, J. M. Robertson

Professor Harrison in his Biography says, "That he was either an habitual drunkard or an habitual opium-eater is contradicted both by the unanimous testimony of his intimate friends--those who really knew him--and by the piles of exquisitely written manuscript, manuscript written at all hours of the day and night, under all circumstances of good and bad health; hurriedly, or deliberately, that have remained to attest a physical condition absolutely the opposite of that of a victim of delirium tremens. No opium sot, no habitual victim of spiritous liquors, could have written this firm, clear, steady, delightfully legible feminine handwriting."

Farther on, he adds, "His brain was always at fever heat, a volcano raging with inward irritability; to add a single drop of external stimulant to it was to cause it to overflow and destroy or ravage everything within reach. There are temperaments that come into the world intoxicated,--so brimming with spiritual fire that there is no room for anything more. Such temperaments are perilously allied to hysteria and madness,...."

And again, "Nervous diseases are not very well understood, and few persons who are not writers themselves realize the exhausting character of literary composition, especially when it is done against a hostile world, and under the strain of worry and poverty.... Poe died of nervous break-down rather than of the effects of over-indulgence in

intoxicants. Undoubtedly his pathological condition was misunderstood and misinterpreted. What was supposed to be delirium tremens is more likely to have been attacks of insanity, and the evidence points clearly to this in the case of the two weeks he spent in Philadelphia on his way to Richmond for the last time."[1]

Dr. Robertson authoritatively attests: "Such a disease as that from which Poe suffered is most insidious in its approach. The liberties indulged in youth and the lack of restraint, laid a foundation which later no will-power could overcome, and which exacted a price of misery, depression, and suffering from its victim that passes human understanding."

These liberties referred to above concern Poe's entertaining Mr. Allan's friends by toasting them in weak wine (when the boy was very young), as well as his reputed intensive and hysterical drinking while at college, at West Point, and, later, in the South.

To continue: "The cause of his destitution was undoubtedly his serious and repeated seizures by his hereditary malady....accounts of intercurrent attacks of sickness which incapacitated him for days or weeks, at first infrequent but slowly increasing in number and severity until we have a classical picture of typical dipsomania, with its accompanying depressions and mental abnormalities. This tells the story of the evil that pursued him and continually thwarted the best of

[1] New Glimpses of Poe, James A. Harrison

intentions, and which made his life a series of financial struggles and failures."[1]

Kennedy, his literary discoverer, said in 1833-1834, "I brought him up from the very edge of despair."

"The many indiscretions with which Poe is charged at this time and which had changed into enemies some of his former friends, were the results of this hereditary infirmity. It must be remembered that dipsomania is not only periodical in its seizures, but that, even in its earliest manifestations, the patient is not responsible, and that his actions may outrage friends who assume those things to be vicious which are the result of disease. No biographer has given full consideration to the heredity, the obsessions, the compulsions, the frequently recurring spells of depression, and the nervous seizures which a are a part of Poe's psychology."[1]

At this point, the symptoms of dipsomania which are suggestive of Poe's case should be carefully scrutinized for a more complete understanding of his physical handicap. One of the most conspicuous signs of this disease is the changed facial appearance and certainly many biographers have stressed the point of how Poe changed outwardly in a short time. The second symptom which is well known to everyone is the rapid development intellectually but a corresponding deterioration morally. This effect has been commented on many times in Poe's biographies as it gave the enemies of the writer a much-sought-

[1]Edgar Allan Poe, A Study, John W. Robertson

[1]Edgar Allan Poe, A Study, John W. Robertson

after excuse to paint as black a picture of him as was humanly possible. To mention a few terms accredited to his name would be to include the expressions, sadist, dope-addict, debaucher, and seducer. Critics are agreed, however, that no proof can be given to substantiate the last two claims. A third symptom which requires no explanation in its relationship to Poe is the periods of nervous disturbance, but not continuous ones. And, lastly, this disease, dipsomania, slowly assumes a periodical character it usually manifests.

Dr. Robertson points out that after an attack, Poe manifested all the consequent symptoms of the disease also. He was not responsible for his actions or speech because he seldom remembered what had occurred; he made the best of resolutions never to repeat his "lapses from grace;" he hotly resented criticism of any kind; he became angry at any reference to his habits; he vowed never to drink again; nor had he ever realized his true condition or the danger of relapse. He firmly believed his cure was complete and permanent--"so why discuss a matter that had been definitely and unalterably settled?"[1]

In the final stages of dipsomania, Dr. Robertson discovered, after it has reached that stage where organic changes have taken place in the coverings of the brain, the slightest alcoholic stimulation may produce disturbance, morally and mentally. One drink may change the whole moral atmosphere and produce a state of mental irresponsibility.

[1]Edgar Allan Poe, A Study, John W. Robertson

Certainly all the indications of this hereditary disease can be noted in the following extracts from letters.

Edgar Allan Poe wrote to Kennedy in 1835: "....in this letter you find much incoherency.... My feelings at the moment are pitiable indeed. I am suffering under a depression of spirits.... I have struggled in vain against the influence of this melancholy.... I am wretched, and know not why. Convince me that it is worth one's while--that it is at all necessary to live. Persuade me to do what is right.--Oh, pity me! for I feel my words are incoherent. You will not fail to see that I am suffering under depression of spirits which will ruin me should it be long continued."

That same year, T. W. White, owner and manager of the Southern Literary Messenger of which Poe was acting editor, wrote to him:

"That you are sincere in all your promises I firmly believe. But, Edgar, when you once again tread these streets, I have my fears that your resolves would fall through, and you would again sip the juice, even till it stole away your senses.

"You have fine talents, Edgar, --and you ought to have them respected as well as yourself. Learn to respect yourself, and you will soon find that you are respected. Separate yourself from the bottle, and bottle companions, forever!"

During the next two years, 1835-1837, Poe suffered from depressive seizures to the extent that he seemed to seek

relief in stimulants. The neurosis with which he was oppressed was so marked that Kennedy described him as "irregular, eccentric, and querulous," and "soon gave up his place" (on the Messenger).

White, the editor, stated at this same time in a letter to Lucian Minor, who later became editor:

"Poe is now in my employ--not as editor. He is unfortunately rather dissipated, and, therefore, I can place very little reliance upon him."

A few days later, he added:

"Poe has flew the track already. His habits were not good. He is in addition a victim of melancholy. I should not be at all astonished to hear that he had been guilty of suicide."

Edgar, himself, declared to Dr. Snodgrass:

"My sensitive temperment could not stand an excitement which was an everyday matter to my companions. In short, it sometimes happened that I was completely intoxicated. For some days after each excess, I was completely prostrated and invariably confined to my bed."

Poe became associated with Burton, editor of Gentleman's and Casket--the two publications which were to be issued as Graham's Magazine. For no apparent reason, Edgar left Burton voluntarily because Poe was in a phase of "his morbid mental life when he was not responsible for his utterances--a period when he no longer possessed the ability to

discriminate between criticism kindly meant and utterances really slanderous." One of his inter-current attacks lasted for several weeks. When he had recovered, he was made assistant editor by Graham. For a short time, he did much good work, but then followed several lapses. On entering his office one day, Poe found Griswold in his chair. Instantly, he became as one possessed, and refused all further editorial association with the magazine. Poe's ambition and effort then turned toward a new magazine he called The Stylus. This became an obsession with him.

Shortly after this episode, a friend named Thomas suggested to Poe that he go to Washington to make an application for a government position in Philadelphia. Edgar went to the capital. A friend noted: "....since then (the second day) he has been, at intervals, quite unreliable." Thomas maintained: "If he took but one glass of weak wine, or beer, or cider, the Rubicon of the cup had been passed with him, and it almost ended in excess and sickness. But he fought against the propensity as hard as ever Coleridge....if he could have gotten office with a fixed salary....he would have redeemed himself. The accounts of his derelictions in this respect.... were very much exaggerated. His was one of those temperaments whose only safety is in total abstinence. He suffered terribly after any indiscretion."

Dr. English, who was closely associated with Poe for several years, claimed that Edgar did not have the physical

constitution that would permit him to be a regular drinker. This trait is so often mentioned because, since his early youth, Poe laid claim to being a "regular Southern gentleman who had been reared as a wealthy man's son."

An unknown friend once told this story--"I, the most innocent of divinity students, at that time, 1847, while walking with Poe, and feeling thirsty, pressed him to take a glass of wine with me. He declined but finally compromised by taking a glass of ale with me. Almost instantly a great change came over him....he engaged in an....eloquent conversation, he became as if paralyzed, and with compressed lips and fixed glassy eyes, returned, without uttering a word, to the house which we were visiting. For hours the strange spell hung over him. He seemed a changed being, as if stricken by some peculiar phase of insanity."

After the failure to establish either himself or his journal, Poe went to New York, where he was employed by Willis for detailed work on the Mirror. For eighteen months, he led an abstemious life, with only two or three relapses. Briggs of The Broadway Journal insisted: "The Reverend Mr. Griswold of Philadelphia told me some damnable lies about him (Poe), but a personal acquaintance has induced me to think highly of him."

However, periods of his mental obsession dominated, and, from this time on Poe's creative work practically ceased. In its place condemnatory criticism appeared. His intolerance

of the works of others can be seen in his "Longfellow War" which is so well known. Poe became sole editor of the Journal at this time, but "his mental deterioration had progressed to such an extent that he was no longer able either to produce original work or to judge fairly of the work of others.... his reviews....showed bias. Apparently the capacity for production was lost....because in the following four years, there was little worthy of his great genius that can be justly said to rank with his early work."

Duyckinck received a letter from Poe, in November of 1845, in which he said:

"For the first time in two months, I find myself entirely myself--dreadfully sick and depressed but still myself. I seem to have wakened from some horrible dream, in which all was confusion and suffering. I really believe I have been mad--but indeed I had abundant reason to be so."

Lowell stated: "I saw Poe only once....I have the impression that he was rather soggy with drink--not tipsy--but as if he had been holding his head under a pump to cool it."

In October 1845, Poe assumed full charge of The Broadway Journal, but three months later, January, 1846, he announced the end of his editorship. This was Poe's last attempt to do serious work worthy of his genius. For the next four years, till death mercifully freed him, his life was one unbroken series of disasters.

Mrs. Shew stated that "they found that he had taken a room and slept for twelve hours; and that, on awakening, he had little or no memory of what had taken place during this period. He had not been drinking....his vitality was low.... he was nearly insane."

"There is no doubt that Poe occasionally indulged in opium," Dr. Robertson declared. "It never became a 'habit'.. ..in dipsomania....opium will frequently be selected in preference to alcohol. This is only a temporary relief and alcohol will become the final solace."

On November 16, 1848, Poe, who had been tortured mentally in repeated seizures and was resorting to any drug to give him relief, wrote:

"....my expression of gloom....of a dreadful horrible foreboding of Ill....<u>indeed</u> it seemed to me that Death approached me even then....I remember nothing distinctly from that moment till I found myself in Providence. I went to bed and wept through a long, long hideous night of despair....the Demon tortured me still (the next morning)....I procured two ounces of laudanum....I had not calculated on the strength of the laudanum for before I reached the postoffice my reason was entirely gone and the letter was never put in....I am so <u>ill</u>-- so terribly, hopelessly ill in body and in mind, that I feel I cannot live....until I subdue this fearful agitation, which if continued will destroy my life or drive me hopelessly mad."

In writing to Mrs. Whitman in 1849, he made a statement which can be used as a summarizing averment of Poe's mental and physical collapse--"I am full of forebodings. Nothing cheers or comforts me. My life seems wasted--the future looks a dreary blank."

As his attacks grew worse, Mrs. Clemm was frequently worried "at his delusions....hallucinations....and homicidal mania."

Now, the question may arise, Could a man so afflicted possibly have written "The Raven," The Gold Bug, and world famous tales of ratiocination? The answer, according to Dr. Robertson, is Yes, because "there is a class of defectives medically called 'Idiot Savant,' who, although they may show evidence of weakmindedness in certain directions, in others exhibit a marvelous development of brain capacity.... Occasionally there are children, known as lightning calculators.... yet who in other directions show mental feebleness."[1]

"Some of Poe's writings could not have been evolved except by the use of a reasoning brain at its highest point of efficiency." No doubt, "The Raven," "The Bells," and his tales of ratiocination would fall into this class, while, on the other hand, such a poem as "Ulalume" might have "been formulated in a brain which was somewhat diseased....his capacity for rhythm and euphony remained unimpaired." From this time, his work

[1]Edgar Allan Poe, A Study, John W. Robertson, M.D.

showed "his mental abnormalities....discussions of the cosmogony of the universe....'Eureka'....belief he had found the solution--and had solved the riddle of the universe."[1]

"I have absolutely no pleasure in the stimulants in which I sometimes so madly indulge. --It has not been in the pursuit of pleasure.... It has been a desperate attempt to escape from torturing memories," wrote Poe to a friend.

In conclusion, let it be noted that a dipsomaniac craves alcohol....did Poe drink stimulating liquor? A dipsomaniac passes through periods of elation and depression.... did Poe fulfill this requirement with his alternate ups-and-downs financially, socially, and mentally? A dipsomaniac often undertakes visionary schemes without corresponding capacity or understanding of their real difficulties or impracticabilities.. ..did Poe not fail in every journalistic attempt that required concentrated and long-continued effort, yet he was determined to found a journal? Dipsomania is a hereditary morbid and uncontrollable craving for alcohol, in which there is usually loss of self-control and an abnormal ideation....did Edgar Allan Poe not experience all these traits and peculiarities? Does this discussion not prove that Edgar Allan Poe had little to do with his success and failure, his talent and lapses, his cleverness and ineptitude? A morbid heredity was responsible for this man, this "'Israfel'....so diverse, so conflicting,

[1] Edgar Allan Poe, A Study, John W. Robertson, M.D.

and so astoundingly confusing....his life experiences....that, in comparison, the lives of most other men of letters are a simple tale."[1]

[1] Israfel, Hervey Allen

THE THWARTED POE

PART II

A chain of personal disappointments showing their influence on Poe's writings.

THE THWARTED POE

Purpose: to show how personal disappointments and an irresolute character influenced the life and writings of Edgar Allan Poe.

The purpose of Part II of this thesis is to construct a chain of disappointments in the life of Edgar Allan Poe, and to show their influence on and relationship with his writings, especially his stories (discussed in Part III). These disappointments began with the death of his mother and ended with his own death in 1849. Family life, education, success, ambition--every phase of Poe's life was balked and thwarted.

Before the effects of personal disappointments on his writings are shown, it must be borne in mind that Edgar Allan Poe had hereditary weaknesses (which were discussed in some detail in Part I)--a family blight. His father and mother died when they were young, between twenty-five and thirty years of age; his brother William died at the age of twenty-five; his sister Rosalie never developed mentally beyond a twelve-year-old child. It is undoubtedly true that Edgar began to be intermittently ill at the age of twenty and was subject to attacks of nervous exhaustion for the remainder of his life.

The chain of disappointments, as I have constructed it from my readings, is as follows:

1. Edgar longed for a real home with parents who were affectionate. When his mother died, he was only two years old, and his short life had been spent in cheap boarding houses and small dressing rooms of mediocre theatres.

2. Mrs. Francis K. Allan, wife of a prosperous merchant, took Edgar to her home because she had no children of her own. She was a very handsome, spoiled society woman--much too weak mentally to handle a boy of his type. Edgar as a child was sad, shy, and lonesome; pretty enough to be spoiled by Mrs. Allan's women friends. "From an empty attic Edgar jumped into a mansion."[1] As he grew up, he thought life would be most pleasant for him, but Mr. Allan made his home life very unhappy. The only reason Allan allowed Poe to live with them was that a theatre fire on Christmas Eve destroyed many of the audience, but the Allans miraculously escaped. This flimsy reason always hurt Edgar's pride.

3. Mr. Allan had several personal reasons for not wanting to adopt Edgar:
   a. He had been an orphan himself and had no sympathy for this handsome boy.
   b. The man hoped he might have children of his own and then Edgar would be in the way.
   c. "The brat of a strolling actor" did not give proper prestige to Allan's social position.

[1] Dark Glory, Dorothy Dow

d. His finances at the time were not adequate to support another.

e. He had numerous orphan and poor relatives whom he had to take care of.

f. Allan had at least two illegitimate children, one of which he was supporting secretly.

The first five of these reasons Allan let Edgar hear of many times.

4. From the first, Allan, who was a determined, forceful man, decided to make Edgar "fall in line," his way. When this did not readily happen, Allan hated the boy. The older man planned and schemed to have the boy--mind, soul, and body, but the young fellow did not allow this to happen. Mrs. Allan never knew of the feud between the two, for she was too busy outside of her home.

5. In 1815, Allan and Poe went to England and Scotland. These were the happiest years of Edgar's life. The uncertainity of his adoption and the gradual change in the attitude of the merchant toward the boy upset Poe mentally and physically. In February 1826, after Allan's return to this country, Poe entered the

University of Virginia. While there, he accumulated gambling debts of over two thousand dollars which Allan refused to pay, although Poe had been reared as a wealthy man's son. This embittered Poe, -- it also hurt his pride.

6. In 1829, Mrs. Allan died. This was a severe blow to the boy who loved her dearly. At this time, the open break with Mr. Allan began.
7. Poe idolized Mrs. Stannard, mother of Robert Stannard, a school friend. She died suddenly--his only friend--the one who understood and encouraged him. She tried to undo what the thoughtless Mrs. Allan had done with her money and pampering. At this tragedy, Poe almost lost his mind.
8. Mr. Allan had intimated to Poe that his sister Rosalie had been adopted by Mrs. McKenzie because Mr. McKenzie was her father. This insult to his mother Poe never forgave Allan.
9. Mr. Allan became interested in another woman and did not hesitate to let Poe know that he was in the way. Also, that Edgar need not wait around as no money would ever be given him then or after Allan's death.

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10. In 1830, Poe went to West Point in order to get away from the town as well as the house in which he was so unhappy. He is quoted as saying, "It was my crime to dissipate because I had no one on earth who cared for me, or loved me." The routine and drill at the Point did not appeal to him who had never been restrained until then.
11. Poe had fallen in love with Miss Elmira Royster. Allan, angry at their engagement, broke it without Poe's knowledge or consent. Edgar returned to Richmond the very day Miss Royster married A. B. Shelton. For a long time Edgar did not recover from the shock of this event. (She was his "Annabel Lee.")
12. At about this time, Allan remarried and then refused to see Poe. Allan died in 1834 without seeing Edgar again.
13. Poe wrote to Allan, "Again, I have heard you say when you little thought I was listening that you have no affection for me."
14. Before Allan's remarriage, Poe wrote to him asking for his clothes and a small sum of money, but the answer was a decided "No."
15. Poe met his cousin Virginia Clemm whom he soon married, after having been given a job

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15. Poe met his cousin Virginia Clemm whom he soon married, after having been given a job

on the Messenger by White, its editor. Once more success and love eluded him for she died in 1847.

16. Frequently, rather than starve, Poe appealed to relatives of the Allans for loans, but most often he was refused.

17. When Poe went to New York, that city received him coldly because of stories of Poe's past, and of his biting satires on New York.

18. Due to his temper, and spasms of despair, drink, and illness, he lost his position in Philadelphia.

19. Poe received fifty cents a page for his writings, while Lowell was getting three to four dollars per page. "The Raven" brought Poe only ten dollars.

20. At this time, Poe was rated only as "a talented scribbler with a flair for the unusual."

21. Just when Poe got interested in the Journal, it failed because of a lack of money.

22. Poe just could not fit into the scheme of things. In America the cult was of the simple, healthy, everyday things of life.

23. He desired to be married again. Several women fell in love with him, but soon gave

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23. He desired to be married again. Several

women fell in love with him, but soon gave

him up either because of his poverty or his inconstancy.

24. At the time of his death, he was planning to marry a wealthy widow, Mrs. A. B. Shelton. (See number eleven above.) Before the marriage could take place, however, Poe died as a result of exposure and his hereditary disease, which had been growing steadily worse.

This chain of personal disappointments together with the development of his hereditary disease brought forth a Poe who was baffled and thwarted throughout his life.

The promiscuity of his ancestry had a definite unfavorable influence on his life, too. Poe often boasted of his family, but a brief genealogical summary will show how little he had behind him of which to be proud. On the contrary, it helps to explain that unusual characteristic which caused him to be so difficult to understand and to appreciate. David Poe, the father of Edgar, while still a student of the law, developed an alcoholic syndrome which probably led to his early death. (He, and, later, Edgar were very proud of Edgar's grandfather, David, who had been a general in the Revolutionary War. He had been only a wood-worker at the time of his enlistment, but owing to his father's marriage to a relative of one Admiral MacBride, his advancement and rank came fast.

He was the only ancestor whom Poe could admire.)[1] Disowned by his father for his marriage to an actress, David not only failed to support her but became dependent on her charity, as well as that of others. This wife and mother seems to have been an intelligent and capable actress, though of no marked histrionic ability. Little of any importance is known about Mrs. Elizabeth Poe, Edgar's mother. Both of her parents, Henry and Elizabeth Smith Arnold were actors, as was her step-father, Charles Tubbs. The two Tubbs and Elizabeth Arnold toured from Maine to South Carolina in road shows and comedies. Suddenly, the Tubbs disappeared; probably they died in a yellow fever epidemic of that period. In 1802 in Augusta, Georgia, young Elizabeth Arnold married a Mr. C. D. Hopkins. It is possible that David Poe, then a law student of twenty-five, met the well-known actress at that time. In 1805, Mr. Hopkins died suddenly, and his widow was consoled by David Poe who had joined the players the previous year. David never rose beyond minor parts and dancing bits--the two together managed to make a bare living. By July, 1810, David Poe had disappeared, and no more is known of him, a fact which always annoyed Edgar.[2]

"But who will not sympathize with Poe and admit that, considering the disappointments to which he was continually subject, and the constant humiliation and drawback of the poverty which met him on every hand, balking each movement

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and design--together with the ill-health from which he was now destined to be a constant sufferer--his faults and failures should not be treated with every possible allowance? .... naturally weak, and lacking in the strength and firmness of will to determinately resist obstacles and discouragements.... the effect of his heredity."[1]

Perhaps no man's life has been more faithfully mirrored in his writings than Poe's. His disappointments and thwarted ambitions are recorded in his tales as well as in bitter verse. Take, for example, "....know thou the secret of a spirit low'd from its wild pride unto shame;"[2] "Heaven is thine; but this is a world of sweets and sours; our flowers are merely--flowers;"[3] "I mourn not that the desolate are happier, sweet, than I;"[4] and, "....tell this soul with sorrow laden."[5]

It has often been pointed out that Poe needed the love, sympathy, and understanding of a woman of a kindred nature--of intelligence--of a type to appreciate his genius--but instead a child-wife, poverty, failure of his writings, disease of mind and body, death--these bound him to a life of unceasing work and poverty. Social position, success, wealth, pleasures, friends--all seemed to elude him, and, becoming bitter and irritated by his hereditary disease, he consistently sank deeper and deeper into despair, abject poverty, and

[1]The Home Life of Poe, Susan Archer Weiss
[2]"Tamerlane", 1827
[3]"Israfel", 1831
[4]"To ----", 1829
[5]"The Raven"

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aloofness. Few knew him, no one understood him, and with the exception of Mrs. Clemn, few appreciated him or wished to.

To the effects of his morbid hereditary disease and of the disappointments and failures may be added lack of resolution and persistence in his character, which two characteristics are so badly needed to overcome and to battle the obstacles of life--especially public life--or to resist temptations.

A more strict home-life, a firmer hand, a better-planned education and a promise for a well-established future, a foster-parent more appreciative of his early literary tendencies; these factors no doubt would have saved Edgar Allan Poe from the far-reaching disappointments which influenced his literary efforts and made him so thwarted that no one, friend or foe, understood him or his harsh criticisms.

THE THWARTED POE

PART III

The relationships between Poe's thwarted personality and his stories, which are reputed to be highly autobiographical, and his well-known poetry.

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The relationship between Poe's thwarted personality and his stories, which are reputed to be highly autobiographical, and his well-known poetry.

THE THWARTED POE

Purpose: to show the effects of Poe's heredity and personal disappointments on his writings.

From the chain of personal disappointments constructed and discussed in Part II to show its effect on Poe's life and writings, it is evident that the boy who was dreamy, romantic, and poetic began to feel ill at ease as well as frustrated in the Allan home from an early age; at least, by the time he was sixteen years old. The annoyance to Mr. Allan in 1823, soon became dislike and mistrust in 1827, with disgust and aversion openly apparent by 1830. There were many reasons for this change of attitude on John Allan's part, namely: Edgar's artistic temperament was not understood nor appreciated by the Scotch merchant, who was growing steadily more firm and uncompromising with his family; Mrs. Allan's illness and its attendant worry for personal, social, and financial reasons caused a coninually widening rupture in the family circle; John Allan desired Edgar's removal from the house because the latter was not interested in Allan's business, nor did he make much success of working in it as a clerk; many tales were circulated throughout the city concerning Allan's interest in other women and the known presence of illegitimate children; and, lastly, Mrs. Allan's death gave her husband his much desired excuse for completely disowning Edgar Poe, who was heavily in debt by this time.

Although Poe was well thought of at the University, he had no intimate friends either at this time or later in life when he needed them even more than when Allan disowned him.

As a youth, large sums of spending money were given him by Mrs. Allan and the servants; in fact, he always had much more than his fellow students and current friends. During his formulative years, Poe was reared as a wealthy man's son with no semblance of restraint, or of thought for the morrow, or of saving for the future. To the day of his death after years of abject poverty, he never knew the value of money or its effect on his character and reputation. When the Allan fortune had been greatly reduced to the extent that it became necessary to sell some of their valuable property, Poe, unconcerned, still expected the money, clothes, and attention he had previously received. These propensities of Poe's laid the basis for his physical and mental unrest shortly after this period in his life, for his feeling of being baffled and thwarted, for his being bitter, egotistical and superior, and for his persistent feeling of being wronged by others; a feeling which made him desire to wound others, especially those who endeavored to help him. A lack of friends, of money, of social position, and of success caused Edgar Allan Poe to become The Thwarted Poe at the age of sixteen--one who put himself in his stories and poems where he could have friends of his own choosing, be successful, admired for his social prestige and for his great success.

Added to the characteristics mentioned above was his hereditary disease (Part I) which aggravated an overwrought

intellect so that there emerged at the age of sixteen, a Poe bitter with "....springs of bitterness which, when disturbed, could arouse him to a passion and a power hitherto unsuspected."[1] Another marked peculiarity was the "restless discontent which took possession of him early in life and continued throughout life--the dissatisfaction of a genius which knows itself capable of higher things, from which it is debarred...." This is a further indication, stated by a friend, of his feeling of being thwarted.

During adolescence a defense mechanism was built up in Poe's mind. Because of keen disappointment in his early home life, because of his not being legally adopted by Mr. Allan, because of his failure to achieve an early success in the field of writing, Edgar felt himself defeated and thwarted on every side. This tendency was displayed at school when he hoped to impress others by his flaunting and swaggering in sports and in the classes in which he did well; it was apparent in his social life from his intense desire to wound those he felt were superior to him socially and intellectually. Finally, it is noticed in his writings by his "escape from reality" complex. He used all his powers of expression to hurt those whom he thought undeservedly luckier than he. His wild passions of envy were whetted by his feeling of being balked; his sense of injustice was sharpened by the successes of others.

[1] The Home Life of Poe, Susan A. Weiss

As Edward Shanks stated in his book Edgar Allan Poe: "He had no equals (in the South) and few who could so much as pretend to understand him....he lacked intellectual discipline.... His parade of learning, of wide and curious reading (for the most part no more than a parade), is as revealing as it is pathetic. It betrays at once what basis of culture his soul desired and how much he suffered in mind and character by living among people whom he could too easily impress."[1] Here again Poe was thwarted, for he was well aware of the fact that he was not appreciated except by those who did not matter.

Hervey Allen pointed out: "Other writers of the age avoided poverty by various expedients: Longfellow was a professor, Emerson was a minister, Holmes was a doctor, Hawthorne found refuge in a minor government employ that Poe tried to obtain in vain; ...."[2]

Many times Poe accused these men of being beyond the need for money and implied that they already had it but through no efforts of their own. He insinuated that their success was due not to their ability, but to prestige, wealth, and social background. He failed to realize that it is no shame for a poet not to be able to succeed in a material world. Poe's lifelong ambition to own and edit a magazine was an outstanding example of his attitude--he failed to realize his desire because of his disappointments at home, in the office, and in the literary world.

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[2] Israfel, Hervey Allen

As Edward Shanks stated in his book Edgar Allan Poe:

"He had no equals (in the South) and few who could so much as pretend to understand him....He lacked intellectual discipline... ... His parade of learning, of wide and curious reading (for the most part no more than a parade), is as revealing as it is pathetic. It betrays at once what basis of culture his soul desired and how much he suffered in mind and character by living among people whom he could too easily impress."[1] Here again Poe was thwarted, for he was well aware of the fact that he was not appreciated except by those who did not matter.

Harvey Allen points out: "Other writers of the age avoided poverty by various expedients: Longfellow was a professor, Emerson was a minister, Holmes was a doctor, Hawthorne found refuge in a minor government employ that Poe tried to obtain in vain; ...."[2]

Many times Poe accused these men of being beyond the need for money and implied that they already had it but through no efforts of their own. He insinuated that their success was due not to their ability, but to prestige, wealth, and social background. He failed to realize that it is no shame for a poet not to be able to succeed in a material world. Poe's lifelong ambition to own and edit a magazine was an outstanding example of his attitude--he failed to realize his desire because of his disagreements at home, in the office, and in the literary world.

[1] Edgar Allan Poe, Edward Shanks
[2] Israfel, Harvey Allen

"He (Poe) knew his own genius and it maddened him to be poor, to live at best a life of shabby neatness, to be dependent on men who could not understand him and who patronized him when they did not snub him. He should have been a prince of literature and lived in a luxury comparable to that of one of his own heroes."[1] Certainly, as misfortunes and disappointments overtook him he definitely escaped life by doing the very thing Shank suggested--to avoid being thwarted, Poe "escaped from reality," but to little avail.

Longfellow said of him: "The harshness of his criticisms I have never attributed to anything but the irritation of a sensitive nature, shaped by some indefinite sense of wrong."

Could not this "same indefinite sense of wrong" have been his strong feeling of being thwarted? Indeed, it could have been. Poe unquestionably built up a defense due to this defeatism quirk of mind which reflected itself in his writings under the various trends of "flight from reality," "soul-in-anguish idea," a profound melancholy, (due to his lack of material and social success), a desire to give pain, especially in the form of revenge to known enemies, an undue emphasis on the abnormal aspects of life, and, lastly, an egotism regarding work in a field in which he had no contemporaries.

[1]Edgar Allan Poe, Edward Shanks

In About Ourselves, Professor Overstreet presents the idea "that any strong emotion is a wish. If it is fear, it is the wish to escape; if it is pride, it is the wish to appear great; ...."[1] Edgar Allan Poe tried to escape from his material world into one of great deeds, tremendous wealth, prestige, and success. In the same discussion, the author adds that the paranoiac exhibits an egotism unjustified by real achievement, he is furiously ambitious, he is contentious, and has a strong conviction of being wronged. He is a living example of unsocial behavior. He is satisfied not by achieving, but through emotions which are substitutes for acheivement. Unquestionably Poe put something of himself into his heroes, their deeds, their successes. Throughout his stories, he emphasized wealth, praise, and high regard. For instance, Dupin experienced the triumphs Poe himself would have dearly enjoyed. In his stories, he gave vent to his emotions in an effort to bolster his morale by proving to the world and to himself, "Israfel-like," that he was superior and that he could be successful if only he had an opportunity and a fair chance to prove it.

His detective stories illustrate very well his consuming desire to demonstrate his superiority over others. This same desire is evident in his articles on cryptograms in which he undertook "to read any ciphered message based on a key-phrase which might be in French, Italian, Spanish, German, Latin, or Greek." It is noticeable also in The Gold Bug.

[1] About Ourselves, H. A. Overstreet

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Mr. Shanks stated in discussing this trait of character: "....all of these (his) stories express something that Poe felt and felt very intensely about himself....he had wasted his powers and given way to temptation and in so doing he had failed those whom he loved and who depended on him.... the special power of his imagination is best revealed when it is least connected with any conscious or semi-conscious thought about himself." In speaking of the Fall of the House of Usher, Mr. Shanks continued: "....the story is an image of Poe's own soul....a story of weakness."[1]

Roderick Usher had an extreme nervous agitation, a mental disorder oppressed him, and his excessive reserve was due to a peculiar sensibility of temperament. Poe described his hero with a personal appearance quite similar to his own. Usher was alternately vivacious and sullen, he had a family disease which caused a morbid acuteness of the senses, and made him a bounden slave to an anomalous species of terror. "I feel that the period will sooner or later arrive when I must abandon life and reason together, in some struggle with the grim phantasm, fear." Madeline Usher can be identified with Poe's Virginia.

In The Premature Burial, Poe undeniably presented his own dreams and hallucinations in the tortures, mental and physical, of this story. His concluding paragraph is as follows:

[1]Edgar Allan Poe, Edward Shanks

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"There are moments when, even to the sober eye of Reason, the world of our sad Humanity may assume the semblance of a Hell.... Alas! the grim legion of sepulchral terrors cannot be regarded as altogether fanciful--but, ..., they must sleep, or they will devour us--they must be suffered to slumber, or we perish."

Poe, the thwarted, here clearly presented that "something" he felt intensely about himself. He wanted to escape from his material and literary disappointments. In The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfall, the hero escaped a nagging wife, many debtors, the law for causing the death of his creditors, and, principally, from life itself by finding and becoming established on the moon. In addition to his superior knowledge of physics, chemistry, and astronomy, once more, the author allowed his personal feeling of being balked to permeate the entire story. The reader himself feels baffled, confused, and frustrated long before the end of the story. The same can be said of The Balloon Hoax.

Mr. Lewis Mumford, in The Literary Review, (April 5, 1924) declared: "He 'escapes into a phantasmal world which registers a complete divorce from his environment'."

The following statement from The Pit and the Pendulum expresses the thoughts of Poe, trying to escape the fate that was fast and yet faster overtaking him: "And then there stole into my fancy, like a rich musical note, the thought of what sweet rest there must be in the grave.... Amid frequent

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and thoughtful endeavors to remember, amid earnest struggles to regather some token of the state of seeming nothingness into which my soul had lapsed, there have been moments when I have dreamed of success."

Besides these few examples of Poe's attempts to escape from life with its disappointments, there are many indications of his ego, over-stressed and inflated by his strong sense of superiority over others, aiding him along his path of escape--away from personal disappointments with their blocking of all success for him. Poe began his use of complicated cryptograms, secret formula, and scientific knowledge, as for instance in Von Kempelen and His Discovery which is based on the thesis that "pure gold can be made at will, and very readily from lead in connection with certain other substances, in kind and in proportion unknown." The foiled braggadocio told his readers that he knew scientific data of which they knew nothing. He did the same thing in such stories as The Unparalleled Adventure and The Balloon Hoax.

"The contrast between his ambitions and the field in which he sought to realise them is not too pleasant to contemplate. But if we do not force ourselves to realise it, we shall never escape from an attitude of bewilderment at so much genius combined with so many ineptitudes and especially at so much work which approaches the highest level but, not quite reaching it, remains broken and obscured."[1]

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As Mr. Killis Campbell pointed out, for his own defense, Poe was greatly prejudiced and stooped to inordinate flattery. He even resorted to charlatanry as may be seen in his secondhand allusions and quotations, his display of learning made affected by an erudition to which he had no claim, and in his use of footnotes and of learned commentary. Other ways in which he sought to impress the reader were his too free use of French and Latin quotations in addition to the extensive use of out-of-the-way authors and books. These artifices were used for mere affectation and show. He was seldom thorough--frequently inaccurate. Common sense and practical sense were often lacking.[1]

When discussing his MS. Found in a Bottle, Joseph Conrad claimed that the story might have been told by "a sailor of a sombre and poetical genius in the invention of the phantastic."

Poe's detective stories illustrate his consuming desire to demonstrate his superiority. In his murders, he was clever, greatly admired, and was most successful, by projecting himself into the character of Monsieur C. Auguste Dupin, "a young man of an excellent family, but, who by a variety of untoward events, had been reduced to such poverty that the energy of his character succumbed beneath it, and he ceased to bestir himself in the world, or to care for the retrieval of

[1]The Mind of Poe, Killis Campbell

his fortunes." Here was the excuse of the Poe who fully realized that fate was continually balking him and intended to continue to do so, though at one time, he had hoped that the "enemity of the fates must be exhausted and that his luck would turn," but Poe seldom "lived for long without care and from care."[1] As fast as he extricated himself from one difficulty, another arose to take its place and to hinder him from attaining his ambition.

There are several things Poe and Dupin have in common, such as: admiration for peculiar analytic ability; expensive and rare books, a sole luxury; an extensive field of reading; a wild fervor; the vivid freshness of imagination; the characteristics of frankness, indolent humor, and tact; --an unusual ability to fathom a soul. Even if Poe did not have these possibilities, he could escape into the personality of Dupin and thoroughly enjoy them, and this he did in The Mystery of Marie Roget, The Murders in the Rue Morgue, and The Purloined Letter. Here was Poe's opportunity to hold up a mirror and see, not Dupin, but himself, the thwarted man who insistently longed for success, but never quite reached it. It was this reflected Poe who said, "As the strong man exults in his physical ability, ...so glories the analyst in that moral activity which disentangles..... He is fond of enigmas, of conundrums, hieroglyphics; exhibiting in his solutions of each a degree of

[1]Edgar Allan Poe, Edward Shanks

[1] Edgar Allan Poe, Edward Shanks

acumen which appears to the ordinary apprehension praeternatural. His results, brought about by the very soul and essence of method, have, in truth, the whole air of intuition."

Poe's feeling of being defeated can unequivocally be noted in such stories as Berenice and The Business Man. The hero of the latter stated: "If there is any thing on earth I hate, it is a genius. Your geniuses are all arrant asses--the greater the genius the greater the ass--and to this rule there is no exception whatever." In Berenice, the unjustness of opinion dealt him is evident: "....in the strange anomaly of my existence, feelings with me, had never been of the heart, and my passions always were of the mind." ...."I grant, at least, that there are two distinct conditions of my mental existence--the condition of a lucid reason, not--to be disputed, and belonging to the memory of events forming the first epoch of my life--and a condition of shadow and doubt, appertaining to the present, and to the recollection of what constitutes the great era of my being."

In speaking of the sudden and incomplete ending of A. Gordon Pym, Mr. Shanks remarked that "....it is characteristic of certain morbidly exalted conditions of the nerves. When Poe finished (or, rather stopped writing it), he was conscious that, after many and cruel misfortunes, he was hurrying into an awful obscurity, able only to guess at its nature, helpless to save himself from it."[1]

[1]Edgar Allan Poe, Edward Shanks

To substantiate this impression of Poe's realization of his being defeated, in a letter to Lowell, Poe explained that he was only negatively ambitious, and was spurred on occasionally to excel fools because he could not bear to let foolish persons imagine that they could excel him. He stated also in the same letter that he lived in a continual reverie concerning the future.

From 1830 on, Poe wrote prose and poetry constantly and well, but the results were abject poverty and a questionable reputation. Is it any wonder the man felt so thwarted when others who seemed to do less had succeeded beyond Poe's expectations? In the fourteen years between 1830 and 1844, he had written poetry in addition to prose, as good as, if not better than any other imaginative writing in this country. With what results? He had to his credit hundreds of columns of reviews, editorials, and notes; a sufficient number of stories to make up five ordinary novel volumes; three books of poems; the editorship of three periodicals. The results? He was poorly rewarded; he was still in abject poverty; his collected works had been given away to be sold without royalty; his writings were not successful in achieving circulation. According to his own word, Poe arrived in New York in 1844 with less than five dollars to his name. Something always prevented him from attaining his purpose.[1]

[1]Israfel, Hervey Allen

[Ianthe]. Harvey Allen

He failed to become the arbiter of American letters as he had hoped for many years. Early in 1849, he decided to devote himself to literature with the objects of enhancing his fame and gaining enough money to raise himself out of poverty, and put himself in the way of starting the Stylus. He felt he was on his way as Graham's was to offer him five dollars per page, and he felt he could "easily average one and a half pages per day--that is seven dollars and a half per day. As soon as 'returns' come in I shall be out of difficulty." No doubt, too, the excitement of the Californian gold rush influenced his attitude. (Its influence may be felt in "Eldorado" and Von Kempelen and His Discovery.) Shortly after, the usual disappointments began to appear--most of the periodicals in which he wrote were either suspended or defaulted payments, and, at the same time, he was attacked by a physical relapse. From 1847 on, manuscripts were returned to him, his heart seemed to bother him a great deal, friends were slowly leaving him. Alone, bitter, thwarted; Poe expected fame; he received only another series of blows--poverty, no recognition, much adverse criticism. Again, he was committed to a life of toil. Because of his poverty, he could not afford an amanuensis, who would have been of inestimable help to him. Writing all manuscripts in longhand was tedious and boring. His health was steadily growing worse, with success still out of his reach.

"Poe was a man of limited emotional experience

and narrow sympathies."[1] Furthermore, it has been pointed out that due to the type of mind he had, he seldom wrote with his eye on the object. Poe delved into mesmerism with the idea of explaining as well as exploring life after death, the unconscious, and consciousness-in-death. Stories of this type afforded an outlet to his escapism, gave him an opportunity to present his superior knowledge, and, lastly, provided a mental release from the persistent feeling of being hindered at every turn. Such stories as The Mesmeric Revelation and The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar are typical of the above-mentioned trend of writing. The latter is most vivid in its probing into the last hidden process of life's disintegration, and shows a morbid fascination for the secrets of the dead--a sadist's delight in an abnormal aspect of life. The terror and horror become secondary to the emotional fascination and strain of the teller of this tale. The same thing is true in the story The Man That Was Used Up--an emotional fascination plus horror. Passion, torture, terror, horror, imagination, melancholia, death, and the grotesque may be found in one or more of these stories: A Descent into the Maelstrom, MS. Found in a Bottle, The Black Cat, The Cask of Amontillado, Some Words with a Dummy, The Tell-Tale Heart, The Masque of the Red Death, and The Premature Burial.

"His consciousness, indeed, during the last five years of his life, seems to have buried itself almost entirely

[1] The Mind of Poe, Killis Campbell

with the problems of self. That the painful events which went on about him in the outside world, during the last years of his life, helped to confirm him in this tendency to psychic withdrawal, there can be no doubt. .... But it is also true that the progressive disorganization, which went on within, produced for him a corresponding chaos in the world without, so that a vicious circle was formed that tightened about him like a noose.

"The very time and places in which he found himself, an age and country which could not understand the motives of an esthetic life, thrust upon him almost inevitably the necessity of exalting himself in his own eyes, to defend himself from the opinions of a world that regarded objective attainments and possessions as the only criteria of human success. All these were pertinent and tremendously significant factors in the progress and catastrophe of Edgar Allan Poe.

"The final result of this growing tendency of Poe, to the final conditions of an ego expounded to the nth power, has been delineated here somewhat out of order. .... Why the 'godlike' soul of this man was so much irritated by the petty doings of many mortal men and women, the nature of the well-spring from which his poetry took its source, his alternating fits of despair and exaltation, and the nature of the tragedies which now rapidly overwhelm him,--will, in the light of his psychic condition, undoubtedly become less mysterious."[1]

[1] Israfel, Hervey Allen

Israel. Harvey Allen

As a critic, Poe was fearless, unjust, sarcastic, discriminating; he displayed a spitefulness that cost him esteem. Disappointments caused him to be bitter and sarcastic, so that his prose writings, all reviews, appeared with biting stings which the subjects never forgave or forgot. "Everytime he quarreled, a narrower field presented itself--one in which to make a new beginning--short stories, criticisms, newspaper editing, poetry, essays--." This narrowing field served as one more cause for bitterness. He believed himself to be by far the greatest writer in the country, and that naturally made him stronger in invective than in praise; furthermore, he had hoped to be a leader of intellectual life in America.

In his story Never Bet the Devil Your Head, he ridiculed and scorned Emerson, Carlyle, and Coleridge, as well as The Dial. This was only one example of an expression of his personal prejudices and dislikes which cost him the high regard he so fervently desired. X-ing a Paragrab and The Literary Life of Thingum Bob, Esq. derided editors and their animosities. Certainly, no group had been more tolerant of Poe than these same editors whom he ridiculed. In this way, his writings suffered another set-back and he, more disappointments. The vicious circle was then completed when his finances were greatly reduced. His "Raven" brought him only ten dollars; many of his stories, ten dollars or less. Several critics have agreed that he lacked "ethical insight," a factor which limited

his influence and usefulness. His limited emotional experiences and sympathies further reduced his influence. These tendencies culminated in his literary nonfulfillment and the filling of his cup of thwarted bitterness.

A final illustration of Poe's feeling of frustration was revealed in the fantastic story of Poe and his conscience, William Wilson. He tried to run away from his life and his annoying "double," but invariably William reappeared to Poe's final and complete undoing. The prophecy of the story of events to come in his life and of the final, total failure of all his aims and ambitions was overspread with his intense distress, disappointments, and bafflements.

"Steeped in misery as I am--misery, alas! only too real--I shall be pardoned for seeking relief, however slight and temporary, in the weakness of a few rambling details. These moreover, utterly trivial, and even ridiculous in themselves, assume, to my fancy, adventitious importance, as connected with a period and a locality when and where I recognize the first ambiguous monitions of the destiny which afterwards so fully overshadowed me.

"In truth, the ardor, the enthusiasm, and the imperviousness of my disposition, soon rendered me a marked character among my schoolmates. I fled in vain. My evil destiny pursued me as if in exultation, and proved, indeed, that the exercise of its mysterious dominion had as yet only begun.

"William Wilson, (Poe's conscience), had operated hitherto, to impress me with an idea of my own utter weakness and helplessness, and to suggest an implicit, although bitterly reluctant submission to his (its) arbitrary will. But, of late days, I had given myself up entirely to wine; and its maddening influence upon my hereditary temper rendered me more and more impatient of control.

"....I now began to feel the inspiration of a burning hope, and at length nurtured in my secret thoughts a stern and desperate resolution that I would submit no longer to be enslaved.

"(The hero enticed Wilson into a small anteroom and there stabbed him fatally.) As William died, he predicted, 'You have conquered and I yield. Yet henceforward art thou also dead--dead to the World, to Heaven, and to Hope! In me didst thou exist--and, in my death, see by this image, which is thine own, how utterly thou hast murdered thyself.'"

To turn to his poetry; it was evident that from 1844 to the end of his life, Poe showed the "marks of his own psychic and physical fluctuations." He was "nervously disorganized and confirmed his tendency to turn inward even more than before. Hence, he was unequal to the more sustained effort necessary for creative prose....;" so, consequently, he turned to poetry, which was at once the expression of the troubles of his inner life and a confession of his almost total withdrawal

from any vital contact with the objective world. Not having had friends at any time in his life, and only a few women acquaintances, all his egoism and sadism, became wrapped up in his hero, Edgar Allan Poe.

Quoting from the preface to his volume of 1845, Poe admitted: "Events not to be controlled have prevented me from making, at any time, any serious effort in what, under happier circumstances, would have been the field of my choice."

Corpses, premature burials, and unique and haunted landscapes of his poems showed the strange paths that he took in his dreams, and the melancholy comfort which he found in the realms of the imagination alone. Here were more escapes from his troubled world where he was balked at every step.

"Dream-Land"

By a route obscure and lonely,
Haunted by ill angels only,
Where an Eidolon, named Night,
On a black throne reigns upright,
I have reached these lands but newly
From an ultimate dim Thule--
From a wild weird clime that lieth,
Out of Space--out of sublime, Time.
Bottomless vales and boundless floods,
And chasms, and caves, and Titan woods,
With forms that no man can discover
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Mountains toppling evermore
Into seas without a shore;
Seas that restlessly aspire,
Surging, unto skies of fire;
Lakes that endlessly outspread
Their lone waters--lone and dead,--
Their still waters--still and chilly
With the snows of the lolling lilly.

Twelve lines farther on, Poe expressed his troubles thus:

There the traveller meets aghast
Sheeted Memories of the Past--
Shrouded forms that start and sigh
As they pass the wanderer by--
White-robed forms of friends long given,
In agony, to the Earth--and Heaven.
For the heart whose woes are legion
'Tis a peaceful, soothing region--
For the spirit that walks in shadow
'Tis--oh, 'tis an Eldorado!

For the ordinary individual, this would be the end of the poem, but not for the thwarted Poe, who added:

But the traveller, travelling through it,
May not--dare not openly view it;

Never its mysteries are exposed
To the weak human eye unclosed;
So wills its King, who hath forbid
The uplifting of the fringed lid;
And thus the sad Soul that here passes
Beholds it but through darkened glasses.

Another manifestation of his thwarted feeling may be found in his poem "To One in Paradise":

Thou wast that all to me, love,
  For which my soul did pine--
.....
  Ah, dream too bright to last!
  Ah, starry Hope! that didst arise
But to be overcast!
  A voice from out the Future cries,
"On! on!"--but o'er the Past
  (Dim gulf!) my spirit hovering lies
Mute, motionless, aghast!

For, alas! alas! with me
  The light of Life is o'er!
  "No more--no more--no more--"
  .....
And all my days are trances,
  And all my nightly dreams

Are where thy dark eye glances,
  And where thy footstep gleams--
In what ethereal dances,
  By what eternal streams.

Poe's "The Conqueror Worm" is regarded as one of the most despairing of known lyrics:

Lo! tis a gala night
  .....
An angel throng.... .....
  .....drowned in tears
Sit in a theatre, to see
  A play of hopes and fears,
.....
  .....
Mimes,.....
  Mutter and mumble low,
And hither and thither fly--
  Mere puppets they, who come and go
At bidding of vast formless things
  That shift the scenery to and fro,
Flapping from out their Conor wings
  Invisible Woe!

That motley drama....Phantom....Madness...Sin.... Horror....the soul of the plot.

But see, amid the mimic rout
A crawling shape intrude!
A blood-red thing that writhes from out
The scenic solitude!
It writhes!--it writhes!--with mortal pangs
And mimes become its food,
And the angels sob at vermin fangs
In human gore imbued.
Out--out are the lights--out all!
And, over each quivering form,
The curtain, a funeral pall,
Comes down with the rush of a storm,
And the angels, all pallid and wan,
Uprising, unveiling, affirm
That the play is the tragedy "Man,"
And its hero the Conqueror Worm.

In "Ulalume", there are mysterious images, unusual and varying rhythms, re-echoing rimes--all of which produce a single effect, tapering off to an inexplicable and inescapable despair.

More allusions of despair and mental opposition follow:

"Dreams" (1827)

Yes, tho' that long dream were of hopeless sorrow,
'Twere better than the cold reality

Of waking life, to him whose heart must be,
And hath been still, upon the lovely earth
A chasm of deep passion, from his birth....

"To----" (1829)

....years of love have been forgot
in the hatred of a minute....

"To F----" (1835)

....amid the earnest woes
That crowd around my earthly path--
Drear path, alas.....

"We cannot deny that as a poet he was frustrated and unsuccessful. He was harassed and embarrassed all his life by his circumstances and his weaknesses. Poe's poetry is, to put it shortly, blurred....if we knew where he found all his images, or their raw material, we should be as far as ever from understanding how they took on their particular shape and flavour in his mind. Certainly he did not understand it himself."[1]

During the entire period when Poe was writing, the New England poets and philosophers dominated the literary horizon and shaped the public taste for the simple, healthy everyday life. Poe was a misfit. He neither understood his contemporaries, nor was understood by them. He was thought too

[1] Edgar Allan Poe, Edward Shanks

neurotic and utterly lacking in acceptable ethical and moral standards possessed to a high degree by the New England writers.

One of the most potent factors which so long have reacted to keep Poe from occupying his rightful niche in the panorama of American literature is the confusion, still prevalent, to some extent, between his works and his personal life.

These two opinions, when Poe realized they were current, caused him more bitterness. He just did not fit the picture, and he could not understand it or did not attempt to, or so it appeared. Beside these two points, still another caused him distress. It was in connection with copyright protection and the cost of publishing books here and abroad. In many cases, it was cheaper to import books from England or France, or to use parts of them without cost, than to publish here in America. So "as a writer of books, then, he was beaten out of the market by English authors. As a writer for the magazines, he was exposed to the same competition, which, though it did not completely crush him reduced his earnings to a very meagre figure."[1]

His poetry, not well received for the reasons stated above, did not repay him to any great extent. The poorer in finances and success Poe became, the harder he tried to bolster his spirit by running harder and faster from his fate which soon overtook him no matter where he turned.

[1]Edgar Allan Poe, Edward Shanks

"Hymn"

.....

Now, when storms of Fate o'ercast
Darkly my Present and my Past,
Let my Future radiant shine
With sweet hopes of thee and thine!

In "Annabel Lee", Poe's bitterness was apparent, when he told the story of love and happiness, "a love that was more than love--," so much more that "the winged seraphs of heaven, Coveted her and me." .... "The angels, not half so happy in heaven, Went envying her and me--Yes!--that was the reason" why sorrow and despair came. However, the boaster taunts "neither the angels in heaven above, Nor the demons down under the sea, Can ever dissever my soul from the soul, Of the beautiful Annabel Lee." Of course, he concluded that he lay by her side,"In the sepulchre there by the sea," but the reader knows of his sorrow and frustration.

"The Haunted Palace" pictured happiness, "in the greenest of our valleys, By good angels tenanted."

And all with pearl and ruby glowing
  Was the fair palace-door,
Through which came flowing, flowing, flowing,
  And sparkling evermore,
A troop of Echoes, whose sweet duty
  Was but to sing,

"Hymn"

.....

Now, when storms of Fate o'ercast
Darkly my Present and my Past,
Let my Future radiant shine
With sweet hopes of thee and thine!

In voices of surpassing beauty,
  The wit and wisdom of their king. (Thought)
But evil things, in robes of sorrow,
  Assailed the monarch's high estate.
(Ah, let us mourn!--for never morrow
  Shall dawn upon him desolate!)
And round about his home, the glory
  That blushed and bloomed
Is but a dim-remembered story
  Of the old time entombed.

And travellers now, within that valley,
  Through the red-litten windows see
Vast forms, that move fantastically
  To a discordant melody,
While, like a ghastly rapid river,
  Through the pale door
A hideous throng rush out forever
  And laugh--but smile no more.

"For Annie"

Thank Heaven! the crisis--
  The danger is past.
And the lingering illness
  Is over at last--

And the fever called "Living"
  Is conquered at last.
Sadly I know
  I am shorn of my strength,
And no muscle I move
  As I lie at full length--
But no matter!--I feel
  I am better at length.

The very fact that he had to write poetry in a field narrowed to his endeavors baffled Poe and made him disappointed as formerly. Because of his attitude toward the world, he became less appreciated and less liked by those who counted. E. C. Stedman in Poets of America stated: "....at his wits' end, he resorted to spells and devices..... Beauty of the fantastic or grotesque is not the highest beauty." In attempting to escape his fate and accomplish one part of his goal, Poe seemed to use a process to write his poems that even he did not comprehend. As a result, he was snubbed by many, patronized by others, laughed at by a few; admired by such a pitifully small number, it baffled him still further. At this time, he should have been his own master because his best work would have been done then, but he had to work for many employers who finally had to give him up for "lost"--he no longer was useful, kind, or tolerant. His prejudice, stinging sarcasm,

And the fever called "living"

Is conquered at last.

Sadly I know

I am shorn of my strength,

And no muscle I move

As I lie at full length--

But no matter!--I feel

I am better at length.

and mental confusion were not acceptable to anyone or to any field of writing. Poe, the Thwarted, had run his race with Fate, and lost it.

No more fitting note could end this treatise than the last stanza of Poe's famous poem, "Israfel", which made his defiant yet pathetic appeal:

If I could dwell
Where Israfel
  Hath dwelt, and he where I
He might not sing so wildly well
  A mortal melody,
While a bolder note than this
  might swell
  From my lyre within the sky.

V. Summary

The writer of this thesis, "The Thwarted Poe", has endeavored to show how Poe's heredity influenced his writings. For a long time, he has been referred to as a drunkard or a dope addict, or both, with an abnormal mentality and a diseased brain from which emanated strange sadistic stories and poems. These accusations may be partially true, although psychologists and eminent physicians are agreed an inherited disease called dipsomania was the cause for his alcoholic tendencies, loss of self-control, and strong desire to succeed over everyone in any manner. It is typical of this disease for the subject to have abnormal ideations and to establish an over-valuation of the opposite sex. The dipsomaniac is a poor competitor and a shirker. A few critics have gone so far as to maintain that he could not face competition because of an "only-child" complex which usually handicaps one by causing him to become a poor loser as well as an unfriendly individual.

Poe also displayed the peculiar traits of the neurotic; namely, he began a new life with each new friend, he had the feeling of being ill-treated, he was unable to repeat a success; he became a bitter, sarcastic, irritable person.

Doctors have been of the opinion that he suffered from a brain lesion of which he was unmindful. And because of the lack of knowledge concerning nervous diseases and the insidious approach of this particular hereditary affliction, his

V. Summary

friends could not explain his peculiarities. During an attack, Poe became insensible of his actions and his lack of restraint. A rapid mental development with a corresponding moral deterioration was also noticeable in his case. Close scrutiny of his pictures taken over a short period of time revealed changed facial aspects. Still another symptom of his ailment was his firm resolution not to repeat lapses after an attack, never realizing he was unable to prevent them.

In addition to these inherited disorders, Poe suffered deep humiliation, poverty, and dissatisfaction with life because of personal disappointments. To begin with, he had always wanted a home with loved ones in it, but Mr. Allan saw to it that he had little of this pleasure in his adolescence. Poe's sensitive feelings were hurt by Allan's flimsy reason for taking him into the household; namely, that Mrs. Allan thought him a pretty child who, because of his cleverness, would entertain her friends and her husband's business associates. Neither love nor fondness entered Mr. Allan's thoughts. As time went on, there were many explanations given him why the Scotch merchant could not adopt him: he had been an orphan himself and had succeeded with no outside help; the Allans hoped to have a family of their own--then Poe would be in their way; the Scotchman frequently scorned "the brat of strolling actors" and emphasized the differences in their social status; he claimed he could not afford to adopt Edgar because of an

inadequate financial condition; Allan had many poor relatives who were dependent on him; he was known to be the father of illegitimate children to whose support he had to contribute.

Poe and Mr. Allan were never able to be together for any length of time because the stern, determined merchant desired to rule the boy in mind, soul, and body. The clash of personalities was endless. Mr. Allan's failure to recognize Poe as a permanent member of his family caused intense pain to the young man.

The deaths of Mrs. Allan and Mrs. Stannard (his only friend) shocked Poe profoundly. These tragedies became two more links in the chain of death which had such a far-reaching effect on both his life and his writing.

Immediately, other women played an important role in Mr. Allan's life; therefore, the gulf between the two men widened by degrees until Allan's remarriage. While Edgar was at West Point, Allan broke the engagement between Poe and a young friend, without his knowledge or consent--another insult to Edgar's pride and inborn dignity. In quick succession, Mr. Allan cast him off, refused him money or his personal belongings, and sent word he never wished to see Poe again. Later, when Edgar married Virginia Clemm, Allan's relatives refused to give financial aid to the moneyless couple.

Sorrow continued to haunt Poe's path. Virginia's death, the poor reception of his literary efforts in New York,

the loss of the Philadelphia position, the failure of the Journal, and the epithet, "Talented Scribbler," gave rise to a bitter, sarcastic, thwarted Poe.

In spite of continued grief, Poe continued his quest for a home and loved ones. Again, happiness eluded him, for his marriage to Mrs. Shelton never took place; he died shortly before.

Edgar Poe was fiercely proud of his mother, an unknown actress, who had married young David Poe soon after the death of her first husband. The irresponsible father was disowned by his family for marrying beneath him; consequently, he began to drink heavily, and disappeared from the scene, leaving his wife and three children in abject poverty. Edgar's brother and sister left him at their mother's death, and he seldom saw or heard from them. Under different circumstances, no doubt, his brother would have become a recognized writer, but Rosalie inherited a "peculiarity" which retarded her mental development and brought about her retirement from society. Further causes for Poe's anger at the world, for bitterness, and for disappointments, were added to the numerous ones mentioned above.

Constant humiliation, abject poverty, a general weakening of character, an over-developed egotism, an intense desire for success, and a widespread dissatisfaction with his friends, the world, and life--from these traits, emerged a Poe who was so completely baffled and thwarted that his life, his success, and his writings were immeasurably influenced.

In his stories, Poe had the opportunity to project himself to the extent of having friends, attaining unlimited success, and acquiring social prestige that he had always desired but never could quite reach. Monsieur C. Auguste Dupin was everything Poe could have wished to be.

After having written hundreds of columns of reviews, editorials, and notes, a sufficient number of stories to fill five ordinary novel volumes, three books of poems, and an unlimited number of articles in three periodicals, Poe still remained in poverty, had acquired a questionable reputation, and was considered of little literary importance. His health was failing him, he had no friends, while he was taxing his health beyond endurance by writing all his material himself, being too poor to have an amanuensis.

His limited emotional experience and narrow sympathies caused him more bitterness--while others around him were succeeding, his works were poorly circulated, but greatly criticized. At this time, he began writing about mesmerism; such stories as The Mesmeric Revelation, Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar and The Premature Burial appeared. This subject he used as an escape from reality, only to emerge more bitter and thwarted than ever before.

One by one, Poe tried every field of writing and felt intensely baffled as the fields became narrower and narrower. As a critic, he was bitter, sarcastic, prejudiced,

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One by one, Poe tried every field of writing and felt intensely baffled as the fields became narrower and narrower. As a child, he was bitter, sarcastic, prejudiced,

and personal. He ridiculed Emerson, Carlyle, Coleridge, and The Dial, in Never Bet the Devil Your Head. Next, came editors and their animosities, (a group which had been the most tolerant of him for the longest period of time). The Literary Life of Thingum Bob. Esq. was the result.

William Wilson, a story of conscience, was a prophecy of Poe and his weakness. Many critics have considered this a final attempt of self-projection but to no avail.

In the field of poetry, corpses, premature burials, and haunted landscapes expressed the troubles of his inner life and a confession of his almost total withdrawal from any vital contact with the objective world. Dreams and highly imaginative feelings emanated from his troubled mind. Once more he attempted to escape from his fate.

One source of irritation to him was the group of New England writers, who not only controlled the field of literature at that time, but also considered Poe, a misfit. They shaped the public taste for the simple and everyday life--a realm Poe never could enter, because he was utterly lacking in acceptable ethical and moral standards possessed to a high degree by these New England writers.

Copyright protection and the cost of publishing books here and abroad caused great distress to the young author. In many cases it was cheaper to import books or to use parts of them without cost than to publish here in America. Thus, he was beaten out of the market by English authors.

Because of the many reasons for his financial and literary failure, Poe ran harder and faster from his fate; no matter which way he turned or how hard he tried to escape, it overtook him. The result? A thwarted Poe--a Poe no one understood nor really appreciated; a thwarted Poe--frustrated and bitter with life and its rewards. Until the day of his death, Edgar Allan Poe felt he had been unduly mistreated, and, had he been given the opportunity, he, too, could sing as "wildly well" as Israfel--if not better.

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